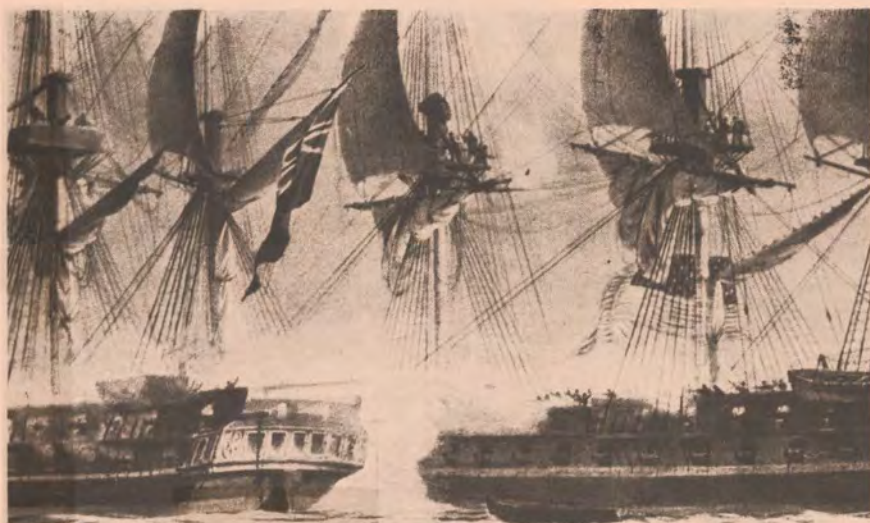


Charlotte in the War of 1812

An account based on the words of the local pioneers who were there, containing an annotated bibliography of sources.



The fighting tops of the old Navy swarmed with marines (today they man some of the antiaircraft batteries.) When H.M.S. Shannon engaged and captured the U.S.S. Chesapeake on June 1, 1813, marines on both sides maintained a brisk musket fire.

This brochure has been prepared by neighborhood volunteers.

The Old Guard of Thirty-three

by
Edwin Scrantom

That noble thirty-three--
Sweet be their memory,
Their deeds I sing--
While Genesee shall flow
Her waves to Ontario
Here shall the heart bestow
Love's offering.

That gallant thirty-three--
Long may their daring be
Cherished and told--
Men who did spring to fight
For their God-given right;
Men whom the right gave might
Stood firm and bold.

Table of Contents

Preface

I. The European Setting and Causes of the War of 1812

by Wayne K. Arnold

II. Charlotte in the War of 1812

by Michael R. Huffman

III. An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Accounts of Charlotte's Role in the War of 1812

Entries selected by Wayne K. Arnold and Michael R. Huffman



Depiction of Hamlet Scrantom Cabin

PREFACE

The military action of the War of 1812 which touched the local area took place along the shores and lanes of the then tiny settlement of Charlotte. On four occasions enemy British ships invaded the waters off Charlotte and twice actual troop landings were made. Several local residents who marched through the wilderness to confront the enemy at the lakeshore left first-hand written accounts. Our aim is to chronicle the action which took place at Charlotte using selected narratives from these primary accounts. It also seems likely that some may wish to pursue the subject of Charlotte in the War of 1812 further, and so an annotated bibliography is included which lists the major primary sources we examined and indicates their location. We do not pretend to have compiled an exhaustive or an all inclusive list of primary sources. There are for instance collections at Kingston, Ontario, Canada and Oswego and Sackets Harbor, New York which we were unable to examine and no doubt would yield further sources. What we have set out to do is place the War of 1812 in some historic context, record the activity at Charlotte, capture a bit of the spirit of the people involved, and provide those who wish some stepping stones to further study.

Part I THE EUROPEAN SETTING AND CAUSES OF THE WAR
OF 1812
by Wayne K. Arnold

The War of 1812 has been called a war of faulty communication. If the telegraph had been in existence, war probably could have been avoided and the bloodiest battle of the conflict certainly never would have been fought. Two days before the United States declared war, the British repealed the restrictive trade laws which were a major bone of contention. Even more tragic was the fact that fifteen days after peace was negotiated, the Americans and British at New Orleans, unaware that hostilities had ceased, fought the greatest battle of the war. Over two thousand lives were needlessly lost. The war was an anomaly in other ways. Substantial segments of the population on both sides were much opposed to open conflict because it would interrupt their profitable trade, and even at the end, the treaty which brought peace settled none of the issues over which the battles had been fought.

Seeds of war were sown as early as 1793, when Louis XVI of France was dethroned and Napoleon I began his relatively brief but meteoric rise to power. Napoleon, the conqueror, certainly had a thirst for power, but part of his quest was aimed at preserving the network of satellite republics which surrounded France and helped insure her independence. It was inevitable that he would come into conflict with the British, who ruled the seas, and sought political and military balance by maintaining their own coalition of friendly powers. The two European giants, France and Britain, warred almost continuously from 1793 to 1814. The United States was eventually drawn into the conflict largely because we had developed a trade network, dependent upon freedom of the seas, which stretched to ports around the globe. Even prior to 1793, the United States had become a major commercial rival of the European powers. Although our nation was young, we had a vast coastline, expert seamen, abundant natural resources, and sturdy vessels which carried rich cargoes to ports world wide.

From 1806 onward, our freedom of the seas was infringed upon more and more. Up to that time, we as neutrals had been trading very profitably with both the British and the French. Although neither side wished to actively alienate the United States, each began imposing a variety of trade restrictions in the hopes of hindering the war efforts of the rival. These included blockades, duty taxes, and sometimes the search and seizure of cargoes and ships. They came to interfere more and more with America's ability to maintain her lucrative trade arrangements. After Napoleon's fleet was smashed at Trafalgar in 1805, the British alone continued to harass American shipping.

Impressment of sailors into the British navy was still another thorn in the flesh of the Americans. The British often removed sailors from U.S. vessels whom they alleged were British deserters. Frequently they were. Treatment in the British navy was extremely harsh, and reward was based on family status rather than merit. This practice inflamed the Americans who legitimately claimed that many of those seized held bonafide U.S. citizenship. We also protested the British right to arbitrarily remove personnel from American ships sailing high seas.

There were elements within the United States itself who agitated for war because they felt the British and their Indian allies inhibited territorial expansion. These were the vocal and colorful War Hawks. They included Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun. British agents in Canada wished to keep what was then termed the American Northwest (consisting of the region west of the state of Pennsylvania between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers) as a preserve for Indians and animals, such as beaver and otter, essential to the fur trade. The Indians were becoming more and more menacing, and attacks along the frontier were mounting. The westerners and War Hawks accused the British of inciting them and instigating the attacks. In November of 1811, when British rifles were found on dead Indians at the Battle of Tippicanoe, the westerners cried for vengeance and demanded that the English be driven from Canada. It was felt that as

long as the British presence remained, hostile Indians would be a constant threat.

Those zealous for more territory also turned with a lean and hungry gaze toward Florida. The Spanish, who occupied Florida, were allies of the British. A declaration of war with England would provide an excuse to seize that portion of Florida held by Spain.

On June 1, 1812, President James Madison asked Congress for a declaration of war. He based that request on the British impressment of U.S. sailors, their interference with our trade, and intrigues with the Indians.

It is beyond our present purpose and scope to recount the history of the military activity of the War of 1812. But we do wish to provide a brief background of the naval strategy relating to Lake Ontario, so that the action which took place at Charlotte can be viewed in some perspective.

One can barely imagine how primitive ground transportation was along the Niagara frontier in 1812. The land was covered with dense forests and the few roads which existed were little more than corduroy paths through the wilderness. The only viable line of communication and artery for supply was found in the water corridor which extended down the St. Lawrence River and through Lake Ontario. Both the British commander on the Niagara frontier and the American commander at Detroit quickly recognized the crucial importance of this water route to the maintenance and defense of their strongholds. Control of Lake Ontario was coveted by both sides.

The form that sparring for control took however was less than dramatic. The American Commodore Chauncey and the British Commodore Yeo were extremely cautious and wary men. Neither apparently thrived on all-out decisive confrontation. Each desired to keep his own fleet wholly intact until the golden moment presented itself when total victory could be won. Apparently that moment never came. Each would sally forth from

his respective home port (Kingston for the British and Sackets Harbor for the Americans) to take a swipe at the enemy, but their theater of battle never got much beyond the opening curtain.

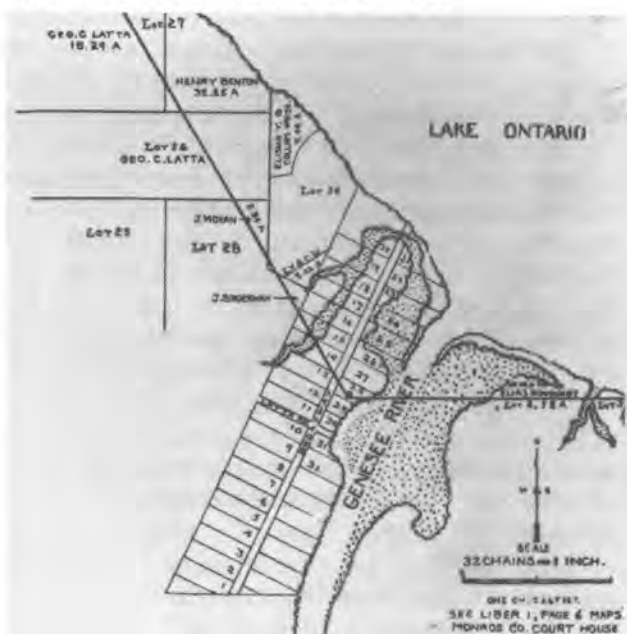
This was the setting in which the action at Charlotte took place. To view these rather isolated incidents at Charlotte in context with the rest of the war, and with the early development of the village, we have included the following chronology.

CHRONOLOGY

by Michael R. Huffman

- 1791 William Hinchey arrives at the mouth of the Genesee.
- 1804 William Hinchey erects his frame house and becomes the first permanent settler between the west bank of the Oswego River and the east bank of the Niagara River.
- 1805 Congress establishes the District of Genesee and the Genesee River is made the sole port of entry for the district.
- 1805 Thomas Jefferson appoints Samuel Latta as the first collector of the port.
- 1807 Samuel Currier builds the first hotel in Charlotte on the west side of River Street at the foot of Stutson hill.
- 1807 In December President Jefferson places an embargo on all foreign trade.
- 1809 The first American warship (The Oneida) was built and launched at Oswego. While on a trip to Niagara Falls, the Oneida stopped at the mouth of the Genesee. This is the first visit by a warship to the Genesee region. A young midshipman, later turned novelist, named James Fenimore Cooper is on board.
- 1811 The first time the name Charlotte is used in a written reference to the small settlement at the mouth of the Genesee.
- 1812 (June 18) Congress declares war on Great Britain.
- 1812 (October) First visit of the Royal British Navy to the Genesee River.

- 1813 (June 13) Second visit by the British fleet.
- 1813 (September 11) The British fleet appears again, but is engaged in battle by the American fleet.
- 1813 (December 19) British troops stormed across the border and burned Lewiston and Youngstown to the ground.
- 1814 (May 14) The Battle of Charlotte is fought. A large British force and fleet is outwitted by a small group of local residents. Reinforcements are summoned and the British retreat empty handed.
- 1814 (July 25) The Battle of Lundy's Lane is fought near Niagara Falls sending refugees to the Genesee region.
- 1814 (December 24) The Treaty of Ghent is signed, ending the war.
- 1815 (February 17) The Treaty of Ghent is ratified by the United States Senate.



Depiction of early map of Lake Ontario and Genesee River (Liber 1, page 6 maps, Monroe County Court House).

Part II CHARLOTTE IN THE WAR OF 1812

by Michael R. Huffman

May we emphasize that when viewed from the luxury of hindsight, the War of 1812 was a war that never should have been fought. England and France were engaged in a widespread and longstanding conflict abroad. While both European powers sought America as an ally in their continental war, America's leaders, heeding the advice of George Washington in his Farewell Address, realized that involvement in European affairs could only lead to tragedy for America.

Finally provoked by years of trade violations and impressment of our sailors, on June 18, 1812 the United States Congress declared war on Great Britain. The War of 1812 marked an important point in American history, because it showed England and the rest of the world that the people of the United States were just as capable and determined to fight for freedom of the seas and national sovereignty as they had been in fighting for their independence in 1776. A unique fact concerning the war is that it marked the last time foreign troops have ever invaded the American mainland. Generation after generation of Americans has lived and died without ever knowing the fear of imminent invasion. It would be hard for us to understand what it would be like to wake up one morning and find a hostile fleet anchored off the Lake Ontario shoreline. But it did happen, not just once but four times during the War of 1812.

There was little enthusiasm for the war in the Genesee Country. The Revolutionary War had been over for twenty nine years, but the settlers were still engaged in a day to day struggle for survival. Charlotte was sparsely populated and just beginning to come alive as a community due to the revenues brought in through the port in the Genesee. A mutually beneficial trade relationship was enjoyed with Canada, and the circumstances which instigated the war were very remote. Bears, wolves, rattlesnakes and the upstate winters seemed to pose a more serious threat than the British. This attitude was soon to change. At the outbreak

of the conflict neither side had a significant force on the Great Lakes. Both military commanders realized however that control of the lakes was essential to victory since it insured a communication and supply line between east and west. Water was the most expedient, and because of the condition of the roads, often the only means of transportation. After a hasty buildup, both American and British navies established small fleets on Lake Ontario. The American fleet was commanded by Commodore Isaac Chauncey, while Sir James Yeo was the British commander.

The design and nature of both fleets established the pattern of naval warfare on Lake Ontario. Each fleet held advantages and disadvantages. Yeo's strategy was centered around a series of lightning fast hit and run raids on isolated American settlements aimed at confiscating food and other supplies needed for the American war effort. The American fleet held the advantage in that their cannons were four times more powerful than their opponents. The principle disadvantage to the American fleet came from the fact that most of the ships were not designed as warships. Cannons were mounted on top of the decks which exposed the gunners to enemy fire during a short-range battle. The extra weight on the decks also made the American ships top heavy. Two U.S. vessels, the Hamilton and the Scourge, were lost on August 7, 1813 when a sudden violent lake squall caught them with their hatches open. Both ships floundered and fifty three men drowned.

A strategy of sorts evolved as a result of these advantages and disadvantages. Commodore Yeo would sneak into a harbor, send a party ashore to demand supplies and then depart before the local militia arrived. At the outbreak of the war there was nothing to prevent the British from landing at will at any site between the Niagara River and Oswego.

War has a way of making its presence felt which no man can deny. Whatever illusions the people of Charlotte had about what seemed to be a distant war were shattered in October of 1812 when three British

warships appeared at the mouth of the Genesee River. Donald McKenzie, a settler from Caledonia who married one of William Hinchey's daughters, gives a personal account of what happened.

"In the latter part of the year 1812, being on a visit with my wife at her father's house at the mouth of the river, he accompanied us on horseback to the residence of my brother-in-law, Abel Rowe, on the Ridge Road. The next morning, as we were mounting our horses to return, a messenger arrived with an express, stating that a British fleet was approaching the mouth of the river, and requesting Captain Rowe to call out the militia immediately. Returning on our way towards the landing we could hear distinctly the report of every cannon fired by the enemy. After leaving my wife with the family of my worthy friend Ben Fowle, at the landing, we hurried on as fast as possible to the mouth of the river. But nothing was to be seen of the fleet or of the few families there. We rode immediately to my father-in-law's old log house, standing then on the spot where now stands the United States Lighthouse, fastened our horses, and from there with my brother-in-law, William Hinchey, Jr. went on foot to the beach of the lake. We soon discovered the fleet sailing towards us from the direction of Braddock's Bay, but not anticipating any danger, we remained on the spot until it approached quite near us. We were shortly saluted with a twenty-four pounder, which whistled through the bushes near where we stood, and entered the bank of the lake in our rear. This shot was rather too close in proximity to us to be agreeable. I afterwards dug the ball out of the bank and used it for a number of years to grind indigo with in my woolen factory."

McKenzie then reported that the British fleet retreated, often discharging a number of cannonballs. The damage was all psychological however since the cannonballs merely lodged in a high embankment. But suddenly the mood of the settlers changed. They now realized the British might be expected on their doorstep at any time.

In June of 1813 Commodore Yeo's fleet captured two American schooners. From the captured seamen he learned of a quantity of supplies stored near the mouth of the Genesee River at Charlotte. On June 13, a party of one hundred fifty British sailors and marines landed. They rounded up the few people in the immediate vicinity and locked them in a building owned by Frederick Bushnell. The clerk, George Latta, was given a receipt and the British left the next day with salt, whiskey, other provisions and a sloop, the Lady Murray, owned by local resident William McKinstry. The dismay of the Americans must have been reflected in a remark a British soldier made to Mrs. Latta when he said, "You did not think yesterday this time that tomorrow you would be walking with a British soldier." Dismay soon turned to frustration. A couple of local men who hid in the woods went undetected by the British landing party and made their escape. They alerted the local militia, but by the time they came on the scene it was too late, for the British were already returning to their ship. A few shots were fired but no damage was done.

On September 11, 1813, Yeo's fleet once again appeared in the waters of Lake Ontario at the mouth of the Genesee. The call went out and the local militia was assembled for battle. All of a sudden, like a scene from a Hollywood movie script, Commander Chauncey's fleet sailed into view as sprightly as a calvary charge, and a running battle ensued which lasted well into the night. Forceful lake winds prevented the British fleet from closing in on the American ships, and true to form, Yeo was unwilling to commit his fleet to a direct battle because the American guns were more powerful and had a longer range. The Americans gave chase, but the English were able to escape due to superior speed. This prevented Chauncey from duplicating the decisive defeat on Yeo's fleet which Commodore Perry had inflicted on the British the day before in the historic Battle of Lake Erie. Yeo and his fleet were able to escape across the lake to their home port at Kingston, Ontario with minimal loss, although three seamen were killed and seven wounded. The Americans then blockaded the British

in the harbor until winter arrived to prevent further navigation on the lake.

Some historians, including Teddy Roosevelt, have criticized both Chauncey and Yeo for avoiding direct all-out confrontation. However, their fleets were so evenly matched that the loss of even one ship would have given the opposing side a distinct advantage. James Fenimore Cooper, who wrote books on American naval history as well as novels, believed Yeo was under direct orders not to engage the American fleet in battle unless he was assured of victory.

Commodore Yeo's visits were grim reminders that the war was real and could intrude upon Charlotte any time the lake was navigable. However, events were taking place to the west of an even more alarming nature. In December of 1813 British troops from Fort Niagara stormed into Lewiston and Youngstown, New York, burning both towns to the ground. There were reports of brutal slaughter, and panic spread when the news reached the settlements along the Genesee. Many people fled inland. The threat of rampaging British troops and Indians induced the New York State Legislature to take stronger defensive measures. A militia was recruited under Captain (later Colonel) Isaac Stone. At this time Stone was the only innkeeper in what is now Rochester and he also owned a farm near the present corner of South Avenue and Main Street East. In the spring of 1814, two cannons, an eighteen pounder and a four pounder, were sent north from Canandaigua. Primitive roads, muddy conditions and the weight of the cannon made it necessary to use thirty-four oxen to haul the cannons to their destination. The eighteen pounder was set up at Charlotte to protect the river and lake, while the four pounder was mounted at Deep Hollow, a ravine near the lower falls of the Genesee. A crude fort was hastily assembled from available timber and weak spots were fortified with manure. This was called Fort Bender and was named after Hastings R. Bender, a settler from Vermont. The site near Lake Avenue and Driving Park was uncovered in 1924 while the foundation for a gas station was being dug.

On May 14, 1814, the alleged "Battle of Charlotte" took place. Yeo's fleet returned much larger than the year before. Chauncey and the American fleet had been delayed in their headquarters at Sackets Harbor waiting for a shipment of guns and supplies. It was common practice for both fleets to seek harbor and muster strength in the hopes of gaining superiority over the enemy.

Hindsight often makes events appear comical even though they may have been dreadfully serious at the time. This battle was one such situation. It was a typical May night in Charlotte, with fog hanging suspended in the air and a light drizzle falling. When the fleet was sighted a call went out and all of the able bodied men in the vicinity were rounded up under the command of Captain Stone. There was a total of thirty-three. One however was sent to Fort Bender to protect the women and children who had been left behind, and one refused to fight.

Although Colonel Stone must have been an impressive figure mounted on his white horse, his troops were the exact opposite. They were a motley assortment of backwoodsmen, and opposing them were the forces of the most powerful nation in the world. The situation looked bleak. Surrender was something none of these men would ever consider, but to fight would have been disaster. Although Colonel Stone knew this, he also knew he would have to do some high class Yankee bluffing to get out of this tough situation.

Colonel Stone did the best he could to put his small rag-tag force into the semblance of a military marching unit. In order to fool the British into thinking a sizeable force was on shore, Stone ordered his little army to march in and out of the bushes and woods. To the British watching from a distance it was impossible to tell how many men were actually there defending the port. They must have thought it a sizeable force because they chose to negotiate.

We can perhaps best and most accurately describe the scene with an authentic eye-witness report from

Elisha Ely, a local merchant who was born in Massachusetts. In his role as a merchant, Ely was responsible for provisioning the local militia in which he also served as a captain.

"About 2 o'clock in the morning we started. It rained fast and was very dark; the roads were exceedingly muddy. We arrived at the mouth of the river after daylight in the midst of a fog. The lake was perfectly calm, and we could distinctly hear the British boats rowing about in various directions. An old boat was lying near which had been used as a lighter. Colonel Stone proposed to Captain Francis Brown and myself to take some men and see if we would capture some of the British boats. Six seamen were found to man the oars, and twelve volunteers with muskets were stowed out of sight in the bottom of the boat. Captain Brown stood upon one thwart and myself upon another, and then with muffled oars we put to sea. At that point a sentry had been placed who hailed us. We did not answer and he fired. The ball passed between Captain Brown and myself and struck the water beyond us. We rowed on slowly and noiselessly into the lake. When we were out a mile or more, a gun was fired from shore, and soon another and another. We lay conjecturing what it could mean. The fog was disappearing very rapidly; we soon could see Colonel Stone on his white horse, and beyond us the topmasts of the fleet which lay at anchor in a line up and down the lake. Directly the fog had entirely disappeared and we lay within range of the guns of the whole fleet, seventeen sail in all. We turned and rowed slowly towards the shore. Soon a twelve oared barge was in pursuit of us and gained on us very rapidly. We feared they might have a swivel on board and they were so near us that we could distinctly count their oars. After a moment's consultation, we concluded to head our boat for Irondequoit. The object was to give our eighteen pounder on shore an opportunity to fire upon the pursuing boat. Brown observed to me, 'Well, Ely, we shall have to go to Halifax.' I replied, 'It looks very much like it.' Jehial Barnard, now of this place, raised his head, and with compressed lips said, 'I hope you will let us fight first.' We had not gone far towards

Irondequoit before the British boat stopped. Brown observed, 'They think there is some kind of trap.' We stopped rowing; they soon commenced again and we too. They pulled a few strokes and then turned towards the shipping, and we to the mouth of the river. The guns from the fleet could have sunk us at any time."

"About 10 o'clock a flag of truce put off from the flagship of the enemy. Colonel Stone asked me whether I was used to receiving a flag of truce. The answer was 'No!' Captain Brown was asked, the reply the same. Colonel Stone then told Brown and myself to do the best we could, adding 'Don't let them come into the river - don't let them land at all - their feet shall not pollute our soil.' Up the lake, a little above the mouth of the river, a large tree had fallen into the lake where there was sufficient water for the boat to lie alongside. We went out on the tree and tied a white handkerchief to a stick. The boat came along-side; the officer, who was in full dress and a splendid looking man, proposed going on shore. We told him our orders were positive; by this time twelve armed men made their appearance on the shore of the lake. The officer bearing the flag said, 'Is this your custom to receive a flag of truce under arms?' We told him he must excuse us, as we were not soldiers but citizens; we however requested the men to return. He then said he was comanded by his excellency Sir James Yeo, to say that if we would give up the public property, private property should be respected.' He then produced a paper signed by quite a number of citizens of Oswego, the contents of which, as near as I can recollect, were that, as the government had left a large quantity of stores and munitions of war at that place, without adequate force to protect it, they would not risk their lives and property to defend it. It was arranged that Brown should stay with the flag officer and I return to our commander, Colonel Stone. I delivered the message and read the paper above alluded to, which the officer handed to me with a pledge to return when read. Colonel Stone rose and said 'Go back and tell them that the public property is in the hands of those who will defend it.'"

"Soon after the flag had returned to the ship a gunboat was seen coming from the fleet, towed by four boats. After a short consultation Judge John Williams was requested to select twelve good riflemen and take a position under a ridge of gravel thrown up by the waves at the point on the east side of the river. A small boat was sent up to the turn of the river, out of sight of the enemy, to ferry the men across. Soon we saw them crossing the march through the tall grass and placed in the desired position - all lying on the ground - from which they were to rise on a given signal from Colonel Stone. Brown and myself were again selected, with six sailors to row the boat. The object was to let the gunboat get within reach of the riflemen, and then that we should go and capture her. The lieutenant having charge of the cannon had positive orders from Colonel Stone not to fire until he was directed. By this time the gunboat was in thirty or forty rods of where we wanted her. The boats towing her opened to the right and left, and she fired a six pound shot, which fell into the river several rods below the storehouse. The moment they fired, our cannon was discharged, and with it went all our hopes. Colonel Stone was standing within ten feet of the cannon. He turned, drew his sword, and I believe would have done serious injury had not his arm been arrested. The first gun from the gunboat was evidently a trial shot. She would undoubtedly come a little nearer the shore had we not fired, and if so we should have assuredly captured her. She was a vessel of from ninety to one hundred tons, sloop rigged. She then fired 15 or 26 eight pound shots, which did no injury except one, which struck one of the storehouses."

"Soon after this occurrence General Porter arrived. About 4 o'clock p.m. another flag of truce was seen coming from the fleet. General Porter sent Major Noon, his aide, to receive it. The demand was that if the property was not surrendered he would land his army and four hundred Indians and take it. General Porter answered that if he chose to send his troops and Indians ashore, we would take care of them, and that if they sent another flag of truce we would fire on it. General Porter appeared to be very indignant at the threat

contained in the message from the enemy."

On the third day Commodore Yeo seemed convinced that the Americans were not going to surrender their goods. During this time reinforcements had been pouring in and the American forces had grown to eight hundred men. Yeo declined to risk a battle in which he could not be sure of the outcome. So, he gave the order to set sail, and his fleet left never again to return to Charlotte.

Today this might be seen as somewhat humorous, but to those who were there it was doubtful that the situation was humorous at all. A small group of pioneers were holding a distant frontier outpost against a large British fleet. No, not funny, especially if you were wondering whether you would survive. It is also doubtful if the prospect of four hundred vengeful Indians being turned loose brought a smile to anyone's face.

Credit should go to Colonel Stone and his men because they showed great courage in the face of overwhelming odds, and they bought precious time until reinforcements could arrive. Bravery was nothing new to these men. They had to be brave day and night just to survive.

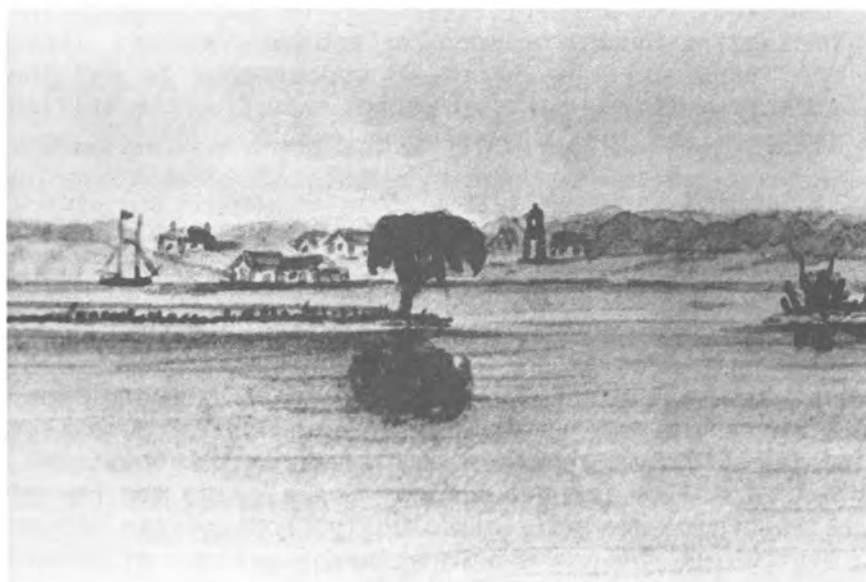
Carving out one's niche in an indifferent wilderness was not a task for the weak hearted. These were men who knew how to fight and persevere. They truly possessed an indomitable spirit. There were forests to be cleared, wild animals posed a constant threat, and the dreaded Genesee fever was always lurking in the background. Nothing came easy. One might have to protect his livestock from bears or wolves, coax a rattlesnake out from under his bed at night, and still toil at backbreaking labor from dawn to dusk. It was all in a day's work. If you had to pick up your gun and go down to the lake to fight the British, it was just something that had to be done. There was no one else to do it.

Even after the last visit of the British to Charlotte,

war clouds hung low over western New York. On July 25, 1814, the Battle of Lundy's Lane was fought on Canadian soil, one mile from Niagara Falls. Both sides suffered heavy losses, and both claimed victory. Actually nothing conclusive resulted yet, like New Orleans, this was another battle which need not have been fought. American and British negotiators had already agreed to end the war. In April 1814, Napoleon formally abdicated, ending the larger European conflict. As a result there was no sound reason for prolonging the war between England and America. Those Americans who saw war as an opportunity to pry the western lands and parts of Canada away from the British now realized that aim was hopeless.

In England there was talk of mounting an all out effort against the Americans, but it was decided that such a campaign wasn't worth the risk involved. The English, who ruled the high seas, couldn't gain control over the Great Lakes. As compared with British Canada, America's growing population and superior command of natural resources also contributed to the decision. A long drawn out war wasn't to the advantage of either side. Problems remained to divide the two countries, but after the Treaty of Ghent was signed, the War of 1812 became history. Ironically, none of the issues over which the war was fought were settled at Ghent, but in the years which followed, a shared heritage and common language prevailed above the cries of battle. The drums of war were stilled and a kindred people settled their differences in peace.

Just as the lake and river determined our involvement in the War of 1812, so with the passage of the years did this water estuary shape the destiny of Charlotte. The water corridor so strategic to military defense became equally significant to the development of trade and later recreation. In 1822 the Charlotte Lighthouse was built to serve as a beacon for incoming ships. It still serves as a beacon and rallying point for the closely knit community at the mouth of the Genesee which retains its identity and independence today just as it did so many years ago when the first masts of enemy ships were sighted on the horizon.



Port of Charlotte in 1826, from a watercolor by
Captain James Van Cleve

Part III AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PRIMARY ACCOUNT,
OF CHARLOTTE'S ROLE IN THE WAR OF 1812
Entries selected by Wayne K. Arnold and Michael R.
Huffman

A note of explanation is in order regarding the sources which follow. We feel it would be an injustice to the primary accounts, and also the reader, to list them in isolation. Some of the narratives are quite brief and most are enhanced by being read in some context. Though not primary in themselves, the theme in several of the liveliest and most comprehensive discussions of Charlotte in the War of 1812 is developed by weaving together a series of primary accounts. Often these are quoted in their entirety. For this reason it was difficult and we felt unwise to strictly separate primary and secondary sources. If we had segregated them, we believe the primary accounts would often have suffered by appearing in isolation.

Each of the entries which follows is either a primary source in itself or an interpretation which is based upon and quotes directly from the primary sources. We have tried to clarify their content in the annotation.

- * Major Wheeler Chapin Case. "Rochester's Citizen Soldiers." Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series. Vol. XIV, pp. 221-288.

Useful for background and biographical information on local citizens who took part in the War of 1812.

- * Elisha Ely. Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series, Vol. III, pp. 59-62.

Elisha Ely, who was a justice of the peace and successful businessman, came to the local area from his native Massachusetts in 1813. Here he provides what many feel is the clearest and best on-site account of the colorful confrontation between the British and Americans at Charlotte in May of 1814. The piece first appeared in the "Proceedings at the Annual Festival of the Pioneers of Rochester" published in 1848.

- * Emma Pollard Greer. History of Charlotte. (Chapter VIII is entitled War of 1812.)

Descendant of a pioneer family, village school teacher and newspaper correspondent, Mrs. Greer includes a complete chapter on the War of 1812 in this text on Charlotte. She quotes from Donald McKenzie and Admiral Hanford and places the War of 1812 in perspective with the full panorama of Charlotte's history.

- * Rear Admiral Franklin Hanford, U.S. Navy (Retired), "Visits of American and British Naval Vessels to the Genesee River, 1809-1814." Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series. Vol. III, pp. 37-64.

Very comprehensive account written by a retired Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy. Hanford, an Annapolis graduate born in Chili, New York in 1844, recounts all the authenticated visits of American and British naval vessels to the mouth of the Genesee River up to 1815. He includes primary accounts of Hamlet Scrantom, Elisha Ely, Donald McKenzie, George C. Latta and Commanders Chauncey and Yeo.

George H. Harris. Manuscript Collection. Folder No. 152, Abelard Reynolds Biography.

Mr. Reynolds, leading citizen and Rochester postmaster, here recounts his first-hand observation of the war at Charlotte in 1813 and 1814, including his near capture by the British.

- * Historical Society of Greece, New York. Eight Miles Along the Shore--an Illustrated History of Greece, New York, 10,000 B.C. to 1980 A.D. Compiled by Virginia Tomkiewicz and Shirley Cox Husted and other authors. Greece, New York, c. 1982.

This photo history of the town of Greece contains a chapter discussing the War of 1812 which quotes intensively from the Ontario Repository newspaper (see separate entry). Since Charlotte was part of Greece until 1915, this book, like Emma Pollard Greer's History of Charlotte, is important to view the history of the War of 1812 and the history of the town of Greece in context.

George C. Latta. Early Rochester Family Records by Anah Babcock Yates. Rochester Post Express. July 1, 1910 - April 13, 1912, pp. 114-117.

George C. Latta was a nineteen year old store clerk in December of 1814 when news reached Charlotte that Fort Niagara had fallen to the British. He gathered a week's provisions into his knapsack, took his rifle and headed for the Niagara frontier to defend his country. In this recollection, Latta sees the war through the eyes of an enthusiastic teenager who returned to Charlotte to become a successful businessman and office holder.

- * Florence Lee. Pleasant Valley: an Early History of Monroe County and Region, 1650-1850. New York, New York. Carlton Press, Inc. c. 1970.

Chapter XX contains a succinct and very readable summary of local action in the War of 1812. Text is based on a number of primary sources and the footnotes for the chapter, found on p. 282, provide an excellent beginning for a background study of the literature available on the war as it touched the local area.

- * Ruth Marsh and Dorothy Truesdale. "War on Lake Ontario, 1812-1815", Rochester History, Ed. Dr. Dexter Perkins, City Historian and Dr. Blake McKelvey, Asst. City Historian. Vol. IV, No. 4, October, 1942.

Scholarly analysis of the conflict between Britain and American which covers the full range of activity on Lake Ontario. Places the action at Charlotte in context and includes many references for further study following the notes on page 22.

The Ontario Repository (newspaper published at Canandaigua, New York under varying titles).

Newspaper contemporary to the War of 1812 published at Canandaigua, New York as the Ontario Repository from 1808 to 1828. Provides detailed first-hand coverage of the war. A complete run for the year 1813 exists at the Ontario County Historical Society, Canandaigua, New York.

Nathaniel Rochester. Osgood Manuscript Collection. Letters of William and John C. Rochester to their father Colonel Nathaniel Rochester covering the War of 1812.

Colonel Rochester, for whom Rochester, New York is named, had two sons who served in the War of 1812. William was 24 and John 21. William, who wrote most of the letters, later became a member of Congress and minister to Panama. Here he expresses his apprehension of the Indians, doubts about the effectiveness of our army, and sums up his condition by saying, "No news, no papers, no meat, and no bed comprises my lot."

- * Edwin Scrantom. "A Boyhood Adventure", Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series, Vol. III, pp. 65-77.

Edwin Scrantom was the fifth of six children of Hamlet and Hannah Scrantom. He lived with his parents in a log cabin on the site of the present Powers Building. Recounts the vivid impressions of a boy not quite eleven who traveled 7 miles from his cabin to the lakeshore in May of 1814 to hopefully visit his father. Sixty years later he wrote this reminiscence.

- * Hamlet Scrantom. "Scrantom Letters on the Beginnings of Rochester", Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series. Vol. VII, pp. 161-196.

Hamlet Scrantom was one of the area's earliest pioneers who enjoyed success as a miller and landowner. These letters to his father Abraham, who lived in Durham, Connecticut, cover the 1812 period. Scrantom discusses the massacre at Fort Niagara, the shock and confusion which swept the frontier, and his dissatisfaction over the way the war was being handled.

Anah Babcock Yates. Early Rochester Family Records. Rochester Post Express. July 1, 1910 - April 13, 1912, p. 181-182. "Grandmother's Story" by M.M.

George C. Latta married Francis Maria Mann in 1839. Late in life she recalled in this charming "Grandmother's Story" her memories of early Charlotte.

Much of the information she learned from her husband, many years her senior, who provides an exciting personal account of his experiences during the British occupation of Charlotte in the War of 1812.

All of the above sources are available in the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library with the exception of the newspaper the Ontario Repository. This may be found in the Ontario County Historical Society in Canandaigua, New York.

Those sources marked with an asterisk (*) are likely to appear in circulating form in the central library and many branch libraries in the Rochester Public Library and the Monroe County Library System.



Winter Scene of Charlotte Lighthouse and Keeper's House

Neighborhood History Project

